

# News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 8, 2005

CONTACT: Tara McGuinness

(202) 225-2836

## DEMOCRATIC HOMELAND SECURITY MEMBERS DEMAND ANSWERS ON HURRICANE KATRINA RESPONSE

**Washington, D.C.** – In order to ensure that the lessons of the Katrina response efforts are not washed away with the flood waters, Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Democrat on the Homeland Security Committee, Homeland Security Committee Ranking Democrat Rep. Bennie Thompson (D-MS) and thirteen members of the Homeland Security Committee sent a letter to David M. Walker, head of the Government Accountability Office (GAO) requesting a comprehensive and independent assessment of the federal, state and local planning for and response to Hurricane Katrina.

The letter reads: “Hurricane Katrina was the first significant test of preparedness and response since the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. While the devastation visited upon New Orleans was natural, a series of articles published on June 23-27, 2002 in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* appeared to forecast Hurricane Katrina, the consequent flooding that could kill thousands, and the large numbers of residents who would be left in the city in need of rescue. Despite this near prediction, the federal government did not appear prepared, nor did it appear to have the capacity to respond quickly. According to television and print accounts, federal government assistance was long delayed in arriving.”

“The residents of New Orleans and Americans across the country need to know why the federal government failed the first real test of its preparedness capabilities since 9/11, even though it had most of the answers in advance. The dangerous consequences of a major hurricane in New Orleans were well known, and Hurricane Katrina was forecast far in advance. It is outrageous that residents of the affected areas were victimized twice – first at the hands of Mother Nature and then as a result of an insufficient federal response,” Rep. Markey said. “The letter I sent today along with my Democratic colleagues calls for a thorough, independent investigation, and I’m hopeful that it will produce the answers required to ensure that our government responds effectively the next time a disaster occurs, whether it’s a natural disaster or a terrorist attack.” The letter sent to the GAO requests information on specific questions about the existing rules and regulation for hurricane preparedness and FEMA response guidelines:

1. Whether under current law, the federal government could have declared a national emergency before, the day of and immediately after Hurricane Katrina hit land.
2. An examination of the challenges, gaps, and deficiencies in the federal, state, and local response to the hurricane in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida.
3. An examination of how communications failures affected the response efforts.
4. An examination of FEMA’s utilization and organization of first responders and medical teams from other jurisdictions, the provision of supplies to the affected areas, and the general coordination of response efforts.
5. An examination of what steps did the Department of Homeland Security take to pre-position response and recovery assets in the impacted areas.
6. An examination of the American Red Cross’ coordination of volunteer efforts to the region.

The study request is designed to solicit concrete answers on what went right and what went wrong with the existing disaster response mechanisms and the execution of the Katrina rescue and relief efforts in order to assure that the lessons of Katrina can be fully addressed by Congress.

The letter concludes: “We believe Congress has a responsibility to the American people to assess the lack of preparedness and the delayed response, and make recommendations that federal, state and local governments might take to ensure greater preparedness and response.

For more information on how to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina check out Representative Markey’s website at <http://www.house.gov/markey/>